

NRCS Alabama Current Developments



October 2005

From The State Conservationist - *Gary Kobylski*

My first quarter with the Alabama NRCS team coincides with the last quarter of the fiscal year. It's certainly been busy, and, I believe, productive. I want each of you to know how much I appreciate what you have done to help achieve Alabama's NRCS goals for fiscal 2005.

As I travel around the state, I've enjoyed getting to know some of our new employees, visiting with old friends, and becoming acquainted with district supervisors/staffs and our conservation partners. I pledge my continued support for the strong working relationships that have been developed in the past.

There have been several major events since I came on board in July. Alabama hosted one of the national Conservation Security Program signing events in Morgan County on the farm of Thornton Stanley. None of those present will forget the hot day, but neither will they forget the warm Southern

hospitality extended by the Stanley Family. Tuskegee University was the site for one of the national Farm Bill Listening Forums. Over 500 folks gathered there to express their concerns for the policies that will be implemented in the 2007 Farm Bill. It was a pleasure to be involved with these events.

The devastation caused by Hurricanes Katrina and Rita present many challenges. I'm sure each of you is personally doing what you can to help alleviate the suffering. As an agency, we are also looking at our options to provide assistance.

Thanks for a great first quarter. I look forward to many enjoyable experiences as we work together.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Gary".

Publications via Landcare Available On-Line

The Landcare website is again up and running. Publications can be ordered on-line by individual field personnel. It's an easy process. From either the Alabama NRCS or the National NRCS home page, select "Publications" from the options on the left. You can "browse all" publications or search for a specific one if you know the name:

<http://landcare.sc.egov.usda.gov/>

With publications readily available via on-line ordering, the Public Affairs staff will stock very few publications in the state office. If you have upcoming events and need to distribute handouts, you need to

plan ahead and order these items directly from Landcare.

When placing an order, remember to give a complete street address and phone number. Post office box numbers will not work since the items are delivered via ground transportation.

The Landcare staff does a great job. They will work with you to get what you need, when you need it. The phone number is: 1-888-LANDCARE (526-2273).



Farm Bill Program News



NRCS State Conservationist Gary Kobylski (l) congratulates landowner Thornton Stanley (c) as Stanley shakes hands with USDA Deputy Under Secretary Merlyn Carlson .

CSP Implemented in Alabama

by Julie A. Best, PAS, Auburn, AL

Reward the best and motivate the rest! That was the message about 90 conservation partners and friends from across the state heard on a hot, afternoon on the beef farm of Morgan County livestock producer Thornton Stanley. On July 26th, Stanley hosted a celebration for the initiation of the Alabama NRCS Conservation Security Program (CSP). USDA Deputy Under Secretary Merlyn Carlson participated in the event.

Wheeler Lake Watershed, encompassing eight counties in Alabama and four counties in Tennessee, was among 202 watersheds across the nation participating in the 2005 CSP program. In Wheeler Lake Watershed, 56 Alabama producers were awarded contracts amounting to \$910,540.

"Thousands of Alabama farmers are committed to doing the hard day-to-day work of making the right choices for the land and other natural resources that they manage. They don't boast about it and they don't often get much recognition, but CSP is a step towards rewarding the work they do," said NRCS State Conservationist Gary Kobylski. "Furthermore, these proven stewards are good candidates for our nation to invest in to further improve the resources that sustain our families, our communities, and our landscapes."

"As an agency, NRCS has helped farmers and ranchers fix conservation problems such as soil erosion or water conservation, since the Dust Bowl days of the 1930s," said Kobylski. "The Conservation

Security Program, however, represents a new direction in conservation and agricultural policy and programs. These payments for long-term stewardship will reward many of those who undertook conservation on their own initiative and who care for the resources that we all share."

CSP will be offered in other Alabama watersheds in 2006. Now is the time to help producers get ready.

Hunters Night Out

By Sammy Harris, District Specialist, Cullman, AL

Cullman Field Office staff participated in a "Hunters Night Out" program sponsored by Federer's Fertilizer and Supply in Cullman, Alabama.

They set up a Wildlife and Forestry display and handed out materials about best management practices in CRP and WHIP for wildlife habitat development and management. The 100+ attendees had the opportunity to sign up for additional information on EQIP and other cost-share programs.

Displays and information were also provided by several wildlife apparel and food plot seed and tillage companies.

The Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources Wildlife and Fresh Water Fisheries Division offered an interactive laser wildlife and target shooting demonstration.



The new Cullman County SWCD Supervisor Melba Jo Federer, shown center with District Conservationist Murray Griffin; Tim Scott, project coordinator; and Sammy Harris, district specialists set up a Wildlife and Forestry display at "Hunters Night Out." Over 100 people participated in the program which featured dinner with dessert.

At the conclusion of the session, Secretary Johanns said, "There is truly something about Southern hospitality. I thank you for your warm reception and for sharing your concerns."

Baldwin County Commended for EWP Work

Alabama has certainly had its share of natural disasters through the years. The Emergency Watershed Protection (EWP) Program has been used effectively to protect life and property when disaster strikes. In order to meet the needs of all NRCS customers, in 1997 Alabama NRCS began using an alternative approach to accomplish EWP work. NRCS became a funding source that provides some technical and administrative support and the sponsor assumed the responsibility for engineering surveys, design, contract administration, and construction inspection. These activities usually account for the sponsor's 25 percent cost-share. Use of these procedures has been very successful in accomplishing a large volume of EWP work in the state. Since implementing this approach, the EWP program has funded over \$37 million to project sponsors throughout the state to provide emergency assistance.

Since 1997, Baldwin County has been the recipient of nearly \$3 million in EWP work. To express their appreciation for this assistance, at the regular session of the Baldwin County Commission in July, the following resolution was presented:

It is fitting to publicly commend the Natural Resources Conservation Service for the provision of their Emergency Watershed Protection Program, the millions of dollars of EWP funding assistance, as well as Baldwin County NRCS field representatives, Mr. Larry Morris and Ms. Ann Biggs, for their dedicated hard work toward facilitating such a wide range of projects which will protect various facets of Baldwin County's environment for generations to come.

***Codified as Resolution #2005-101 of the Baldwin County Commission
And signed by Chairman David E. Bishop, Vice Chairman Albert Lispcomb, Commissioner Frank Burt, Jr., and Commissioner Wayne A. Gruenloh***

Congratulations to Larry and Ann for this recognition, and to all NRCS employees who have helped administer the EWP program in the state.



Members of the Alabama conservation partnership (l-r front row): Betty Walker, Alice Love, April Jones, Secretary Johanns, Bill Hughes; (back row): Jason Gardner, Dr. L. E. Ensminger, Gary Koblyski, John Curtis, Ray Donaldson, George Robertson, and Rhoda Kerr.

Alabama Hosts Farm Bill Listening Forum

by Julie A. Best, Public Affairs Specialist, Auburn, AL

Alabama was privileged to host one of the Farm Bill Listening Sessions in August. USDA Secretary Mike Johanns participated in the forum. Members of the public were invited to express their views about farm and rural policy to help develop the next Farm Bill. Over 500 people assembled for the forum at historic Tuskegee University.

Tuskegee President Benjamin Payton welcomed the group. He said, "It is only fitting that this group should be gathered at Tuskegee University where our founding father George Washington Carver worked so hard to revolutionize southern agriculture."

Attendee Congressman Artur Davis said, "Farming should never be a marginal experience. Congress is trying to keep pace with a way to make farming a profitable venture. We all have common bonds. Our struggles are the same. The policy of the farm bill is an effort to keep the future what it should be for the farming community."

In explaining the purpose of the listening forums, Secretary Johanns said, "The 2007 Farm Bill will affect America's entire agricultural community, so I believe our entire agricultural community should have a say in the process. I welcome input from across the nation about what is working and what we can do to improve farm policy."

The Tuskegee listening session, one of a series held around the country, focused on a variety of topics, including conservation. For about three hours, Secretary Johanns listened to concerned citizens who each had two minutes to express their view of what should be addressed in the 2007 Farm Bill.

Meeting Needs Through Training

UNA Students Learn About NRCS

by Renea Dyer, District Conservationist, Florence, AL

Dr. Greg Gaston, a geography professor from the University of North Alabama (UNA), teaches a class on natural resources. He wanted his students to see the importance of conserving natural resources, while learning about NRCS and various jobs related to natural resource conservation.

In April, his class visited the Florence NRCS/SWCD office. We discussed some of the cost-share programs such as WHIP, EQIP, and CSP, and how these programs benefit both the landowner and the environment. We discussed practices that provide cost-share assistance. We explained how these practices—well and trough systems, grass planting, conservation tillage, cover crops, riparian forest buffers, and livestock exclusion from creeks and streams—help conserve our natural resources.

After classroom presentations, we headed outside where two demonstration stations were set up. Penny Everitt, Soil Conservation Technician (SCT), taught a station on basic surveying principals. She explained the correct procedure for using a level and rod. The students were then allowed to do some elementary surveying by taking readings and recording them in a field notebook.

I taught a station on soil structure and function. The students were given a chance to bore a hole with a soil auger. We talked about the importance of soil texture for different applications. We also discussed infiltration rates and how they relate to conservation practices.

This was a wonderful learning experience. The students had a great time and became more aware of how NRCS helps conserve our natural resources for future generations. The NRCS staff enjoyed interacting with the students and appreciated the opportunity to tell them about the work we do. It is another good example of a win/win situation!



About 60 people heard presentations and viewed demonstrations featuring new and innovative products for erosion and sediment control at the field day hosted by Morgan County SWCD. Jeff Clark (c), Chairman of the Morgan County SWCD, demonstrates how the hydro-mulcher/seeders works.

Red Water Blues Field Days

by Jay Grantland, Cotaco Creek Watershed Project Coordinator, Hartselle, AL

In 2005, the Alabama Erosion and Sediment Control Partnership again plans to sponsor Red Water Blues Field Days at four locations across the state. Morgan County Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) hosted the first workshop at the Annunciation of the Lord Catholic Church and The Farm in Decatur, Alabama, in September 2005.

Jeff Clark, Chairman of the Morgan County SWCD, welcomed about 60 attendees from Alabama. The program featured demonstrations of best management practices to control erosion and sediment on construction and commercial sites. Among the practices demonstrated were temporary seeding, sediment barriers, inlet protection, and channel stabilization. The program included a ditch



SCT Penny Everitt explains the basics of surveying and how surveying is used in every day activities in the work of NRCS to a UNA student.

bank and steep slope stabilization site and featured a demonstration of a hydro-mulcher/seeder that belongs to the Alabama Mountain Rivers and Valleys Resource Conservation and Development (RC&D) Council.

A barbecue lunch and a copy of the "Field Guide for Erosion and Sediment Control on Construction Sites in Alabama" booklet is included with each field day registration.

The 2004 field days were a tremendous success. By sponsoring the field days again in 2005, the Alabama Erosion and Sediment Control Partnership provides a means for individuals who work with earth moving projects to have access to current information and technologies.

For additional information, see the Earl Norton story on page 7.

Teach-the-Teacher Workshops

In June, District Administrative Coordinators (DACs) in six counties conducted Teach-the-Teacher workshops for elementary and high school teachers including various aspects of conservation and environmental protection. More than 75 teachers attended the training and received continuing education credits.

The workshops were tailored after the very successful ones originally developed in Madison County by DAC Kathy Walker. Kathy's workshops have received rave reviews by attending teachers. She must now limit her week-long sessions to a first-come, first-served basis.

The State Soil and Water Conservation Committee (SWCC) saw the value of the Madison County experience and sought grant assistance from the Alabama Department of Environmental Management (ADEM) to conduct a training session for other DACs. In addition, the Alabama Association of Conservation Districts (AACD) contributed funding to support training.



Shelby County teachers took a field trip to the county landfill.

Dr. Doug Phillips, producer of the popular Alabama Public Television (APT) series *Discovering Alabama*, had been part of the Madison County program for the past five years. He also saw the value of extending the program to other districts and partnered the *Discovering Alabama* series in this effort.

The June training sessions were held in Lawrence, Elmore, Shelby, Lee, and Dale Counties, in addition to the one in Madison County. The new districts typically held three-day programs, and the initial response from teachers was excellent. Some of the DACs who are new to the program are considering having longer programs next year.

Kathy Walker testifies, "Money has followed success. I used to work hard to find money to pay for materials, t-shirts, meals, and field trips. Now sponsors who have previously supported the program at modest levels are recognizing the benefits to the teachers, as well as to themselves, and are increasing donations."

The success of the Teach-the-Teacher workshops was demonstrated by a number of counties holding their own teacher workshops. Kim Joiner, District Administrative Coordinator in Shelby County hosted a three-day teacher workshop in June. Topics covered included a presentation by Paul Kennedy on where to look and how to apply for grants that would help teachers fund their educational activities.

The SWCC hopes to expand the Teach-the-Teacher program to other districts next year. These workshops are doing more than just conservation. They are providing valuable information that will be useful to teachers in a number of ways.



Daphne Moland (r) wildlife biologist at Wheeler Wildlife Refuge, brought her pet snake, Pine Cone, to the teacher training session. Henrietta Taylor, Lawrence County DAC, was not too anxious to hold this snake!

From the Civil Rights Advisory Committee

Asian Islander Pacific Organization, National Civil Rights Committee (NCRC), and State Civil Rights Advisory Committee (CRAC) Chairperson Meeting

By Joyce Nicholas, Soil Conservationist, Marion, AL

It was a great opportunity for Alice Love, Alabama NRCS Farm Bill Specialist and a member of the National Civil Rights Committee (NCRC); and me, Joyce Nicholas, Soil Conservationist, Perry and Bibb Counties and Vice-Chair of the Alabama State Civil Rights Advisory Committee (CRAC); to attend these meetings in Wichita, Kansas, in August.

Alice met with NCRC about various national issues, while I was busy sharing and gathering information with 20 other state CRAC chairpersons.

How are we doing in Alabama—in reference to our CRAC activities? You may also be wondering how we stand in comparison with other states. I can tell you first hand that Alabama is right on target with other states such as Florida, California, Georgia, and Kansas.

Guest speakers at the conference and training:

- Chief Bruce Knight gave a brief thank you to all the states and stated his gratitude for the support states displayed through attendees.
- Outreach Director Larry Holmes commended Alabama for its outreach efforts with the Limited Resource Farmers Initiative.
- Art Horton, NRCS National Civil Rights Division, gave an overview of the Division.
- Rosendo Trevino, STC from New Mexico and the NCRC Chair, was available for one-on-one discussions with state chairs.
- Sharyn Alvarez, National Federal Women Program (FWP) Manager gave presentations on the FWP and career opportunities.

I met with employees from across the nation and learned about what they are doing, goals they are obtaining, and how they are working to improve their committees. I shared some really good ideas from Alabama's CRAC and brought home some really good ideas as well!

During the next year, it is my goal to request and obtain more training on Civil Rights and the responsibilities of the CRAC for our employees and partners. I encourage everyone to access the Alabama NRCS home page and click on "Civil Rights" on the right border for more information.

If you have questions or concerns, contact your team representative or one of our Special Emphasis



Alabama CRAC Vice-Chair Joyce Nicholas met with Rosendo Trevino, STC from New Mexico and the NCRC Chair.

Program Managers. Of course, CRAC Chair Terry Williamson and I are always available as well.

The next Alabama CRAC meeting will be November 17, 2005, at the Poarch Band of Creek Indians Reservation in Atmore. Please submit concerns you may have for the committee to discuss by completing a Concern Form found on Alabama NRCS home page (<http://www.al.nrcs.usda.gov/about/crights/crac.html>).

October is ...

Hispanic Heritage Month



Disability Awareness Month



... And a reminder from FWP Manager Linda McGraw--it is also Breast Cancer Awareness Month



Retiree News

Norton is Water Conservationist of the Year

A story about Earl L. Norton, retired NRCSer, was in our July 2005 newsletter for being SWCS Fellow of the Year, a prestigious national award. In August he received another award—Water Conservationist of the Year—at the 2005 Governor's Conservation Achievement Awards (GCAA) banquet held by the Alabama Wildlife Federation (AWF). These awards are some of the most prestigious conservation honors in Alabama and are given to individuals and organizations that make great contributions to the conservation of Alabama's wildlife and related natural resources.

For almost 45 years, Earl has promoted conservation in Alabama. Throughout his NRCS



career, and later as a private consultant, he has conducted valuable research, developed handbooks and manuals, and trained professionals to protect water quality through erosion and sediment control.

Following his retirement from NRCS in 1995, Earl turned his attention to erosion and sediment control on construction sites and developing urban areas. Since 2001, Earl has coordinated the Erosion and Sediment Control Program for the Alabama Soil and Water Conservation Committee as a contractor through the Alabama Chapter of the Soil and Water Conservation Society. He was the primary author of the revised Alabama Handbook for Erosion Control, Sediment Control and Stormwater Management on Construction Sites and Urban Areas, published in 2003. Over 900 copies of the Handbook have been distributed. Earl has coordinated seminars and served as instructor for over 750 professionals in Alabama including city and county engineers, private engineers, Alabama Department of Transportation personnel, Alabama Department of Environmental Management personnel, developers, contractors, inspectors, and others.

Erosion Control Field Days have also been conducted throughout the state allowing over 400 people to see first-hand the practices described in the Handbook. (See a story about Field Days on page 4.)

Earl's efforts with erosion and sediment control on construction sites have already had an impact by reducing the amount of sediment leaving urbanizing areas which can cause downstream effects on the rural wildlife areas. NRCS State Conservation Engineer Perry Oakes said, "Earl Norton has almost single-handedly brought the major players in Alabama's erosion and sediment control efforts together to develop a program for the state that is showing major changes on the landscape. Alabama's environment will forever be improved as a result of Earl's work."

Joe Berry, Retired DC, Passes Away

The NRCS Family lost a true friend with the recent death of Joe Berry. Joe rose up through the NRCS ranks, starting as a soil scientist and retiring from NRCS as the District Conservationist for the Huntsville Field Office. Throughout his career, he earned the love and respect of his co-workers. In an article in the *Decatur Daily News*, his wife, Bertha, said, "He didn't want any recognition or anything like that. He didn't want to be flattered about what he did." She was referring to his work with the Hartselle City Board of Education, but those words could be applied to his association with NRCS as well. Joe was a mentor—an approachable, caring soul who helped us negotiate our way through life's maze as an invisible partner, whispering hope and reproofs on the journey toward excellence. As we say good-bye to Joe, those of us who were fortunate enough to know him will pause to think about the things he has taught us without directly instructing us, and about the courage he has given us by the way he handled life. We are indeed blessed that Joe's path crossed ours.

If you would like to send cards to the family, the address is:

Bertha Berry

2306 Peach Orchard Road
Hartselle, AL 35640



Joe Berry with the light of his life, 10 year-old grandson E.J.

Hurricanes Katrina and Rita

Hurricane Katrina hit land near the Mississippi/Louisiana border. It devastated the southern coast of Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, and Florida. NRCS continues to assess damage to watersheds, agriculture, and timber in the affected areas.

The clean-up was further burdened by the close-following Hurricane Rita that did additional damage to Louisiana and left destruction in Texas.

The Alabama home page has new information on an on-going basis. Please check out the site for photos and stories.

<http://www.al.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/ewp/katrina/index.html>

Submit stories of how you or your community is helping with the recovery, or how you were helped, to the Public Affairs staff in the state office.

Annual Alabama Landowner and TREASURE Forest Conference

A field trip to the property of former Alabama Chief Justice C.C. "Bo" Torbert and a tour of the new Auburn School of Forestry and Wildlife Sciences facility was part of the activities for the opening day of the 22nd annual conference October 6-7 at the Auburn Conference Center.



Mr. Torbert presented a history of his property and programs on forestry/herbicide, pond management, invasive species management, and a mulching machine demonstration.

Alabama NRCS staff set up a display and participated in the activities.

Personnel

Accessions

Zachry Adams, Soil Conservationist, Cullman, Alabama

Matthew Copeland, Soil Conservation Technician, Hamilton, Alabama

Craig Johnson, Soil Conservationist, Centre, Alabama

Kent St. John, Soil Conservation Technician, Gadsden, Alabama

Promotions

Merry Buford, Soil Conservationist, Andalusia, Alabama

Marshall Colburn, Soil Conservation Technician, Mobile, Alabama

Brian Coaker, Soil Conservation Technician, Jackson, Alabama

Jeff Ethridge, Soil Conservation Technician, Abbeville, Alabama

Grant Gordy, Soil Conservation Technician, Marion, Alabama

Shane King, Agricultural Engineer, Oxford, Alabama

Scotty Noles, Soil Conservation Technician, Wedowee, Alabama

Chris Rice, Soil Conservation Technician, Scottsboro, Alabama

Alex Vaughan, Soil Conservationist, Dothan, Alabama

Wade Williams, Soil Conservation Technician, Eutaw, Alabama

Reassignments

Robert Beaty, Project Leader, Coosa Soil Survey Office, Rockford, Alabama, to Resource Soil Scientist, Opelika Field Office

Pat Brewer, Secretary, Auburn, Alabama, to Veterans Claims Representative, Veterans Affairs, Decatur, Georgia

Milton Tuck, Resource Soil Scientist, Tallapoosa County Soil Survey Office, Alexander City, Alabama, to Resource Soil Scientist, Tuscaloosa Project Office, Tuscaloosa, Alabama

Resignation

Bill Keys, District Conservationist, Mobile, Alabama

Summer Intern - Expiration of Appointment

Evins Wiley, Bay Minette, Alabama, Tuskegee University

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